Geography of the Arab Spring

An analysis of the Syrian revolutionary process from a spatial point of view

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June 2013

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Summary

The aim of this thesis is to reduce the gap that exists between the theoretical and empirical knowledge about revolutionary processes, the Arab Spring in particular. The research consists of a case study of the revolution in Syria. The country is suffering from a civil war which is the result of the violent approach the Syrian regime used to quell the popular uprisings of early 2011.

The case is approached from a geographical point of view. The reason for this choice is that studies regarding the Arab Spring or revolutions in general are highly politically oriented. The spatial orientation as used in this thesis results in both interesting and useful insights in the Syrian casestudy, but also in the Arab Spring as a whole and of revolutions in general.

The study has been a desk research, as field research in Syria at this point in time is dangerous and also requires more time and money than was available for this particular research. The data used to analyze the case has been collected from a selection of the thousands of scientific papers and books, newspaper- and background articles and policy documents that are widely available. In order to present an image as objective as possible, data from various sources is used. The method used in order to analyze the Syrian revolutionary process is loosely based on several methods of qualitative research, such as grounded theory and critical discourse analysis.

The theoretical framework that is used in this thesis in order to understand the empirical findings in a better way is based on scientific literature from various disciplines, such as geography, political sciences, sociology and history. The understanding of the concept "revolution" is mainly based on two works of Krejci (1983 and 1994), which are both studies of the theoretical background of revolutionary processes in general. Based on his theory the researched case has been classified as being a vertical revolution from below, meaning that it is a revolution that originated from the lower parts of society and was directed against the national regime. The revolutionary process can be divided up into several phases. Krejci (1994) designed such a model. A slightly altered version of this model is used in order to study the case chosen for this thesis. The phases range from the "foundation" to the "consolidation overthrow". However, for the analysis only the first five phases of the model (which consists of eight phases in total) have been used, as the researched revolutionary process still finds itself in phase five.

In the search for universal geographical causes of revolutions again writings about revolutions in general have been used, but also theories regarding space and urbanity. This collection of literature was completed with literature about the Arab Spring. Based on earlier studies a web of geographical causes of the Syrian revolutionary process has been designed. The main focus lies on the interconnected spheres of demography, economy and the urban sphere. This trinity is complemented with the factors "culture" and "food shortage". For a better understanding of the urban sphere in particular theories of Henri Lefebvre (1996) are used. According to Lefebvre the "urban society" is the end phase of a developing society, which all societies should strive for as all people hold a "right to the city". That means the right to make use of

"the city" to fulfil ones need for qualitative growth of his personal life, by "enabling the full and complete usage of these moments and places" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 179). In order to reach the phase of "urban society" the help of the government is necessary, because it is considered essential that the spatial planning of society is "oriented towards social needs" (Lefebvre, 1991, 178). When the road to the "urban society" is blocked by an unwilling government the only way to reach it is by revolution, which Lefebvre called an urban revolution.

In order to analyze the Syrian revolutionary process properly the empirical findings have to be compared to the theoretical framework. To do this the second chapter consists of a "story" of the course of the revolution in Syria, based on the data collected from various sources. The story is built up according to the eight phase model as described in the theoretical framework.

Feelings of dissatisfaction increased among the Syrian population as a result of the interconnected spheres of demography, economy and urban life. The high fertility of Arab women has left the entire region stuck with a youth bulge of people between the ages of 15 and 24 (Mirkin, 2013, p. 7). There was not enough work to provide every job seeker with a job. This shortage was caused by an already poor economy that recently worsened because of the global economic crisis. The country simply had to deal with a surplus of young people looking for work. This resulted in high youth unemployment, which caused a wave of urbanisation as the jobless youngsters moved to the cities in the hope of a better future. The situation was worsened by increasing bread prices, as a result of a global wheat scarcity. However, at this point the feelings of injustice had not yet grown large enough to make the people face their repressive government. That moment came when the people of other countries in the region opposed their regimes and claimed their freedom, the process that has been named the Arab Spring. The situation of those people increased as dictators were expelled. The people of Syria now felt relative deprivation, they were worse of than the people in neighbouring countries. These general feelings of injustice were expressed by the people through mass demonstrations in various Syrian cities. In a short time institutions were formed, such as the Local Coordination Committees. By institutionalizing the revolutionary process the organisation and thereby the effectiveness increased.

Security forces originally responded with non-lethal riot control. After a short time they turned to lethal riot control, after which they turned to the besieging of entire cities and towns. During this process unarmed protests turned into armed rebellion. Several organizations such as the Free Syrian Army were founded to battle government troops. When the rebels increased in numbers, more battles were fought in the cities of Syria. Ther rebels grew stronger. At a certain point Assad apparently decided to commit "urbicide" as a weapon of last resort against the rebels. Entire city districts were shelled, which resulted in the complete destruction of neighbourhoods and the death of hundreds of people, both rebels and civilians.

When this overview of events during the Syrian revolutionary process is placed against the background of the theoretical framework, the geographical factors of the process become visible. Demographical aspects of the Syrian society were for a great amount responsible for the poor economical situation of the country. Because of that particular situation many people moved from the Syrian periphery to the centres, the cities. The populations of large cities such as Damascus and Aleppo strongly increased and it was this growth of the urban population that eventually caused a *révolution urbaine* in Syria. The revolution began with a striking revolutionary class. In contrary to the classic Lefebvrian vision it was not the working class that stood up against its government, it was the exact opposite. In the Syrian revolutionary process it was the growing majority of unemployed youngsters that took the lead in an uprising against a crusted regime, making it a revolution of the *non*-working class. Demography influenced economy. Economy influenced the cities. Finally the urban revolution caused by these centres of urban life originated from the huge amount of youngsters that populated them.

Geography did not only play a role in the reasons the revolutionary process was initiated. Also the course of the revolution was for a large part spatial. As the revolution in Syria could be characterized as an urban revolution, the cities have played an important role in the initial stages of the process. The city was used as a space of mobilization wherein Local Coordination Committees organized mass protests against the regime through an *infrastructure of people*. The city as mobilizing space has played a large role in the growth of the revolution.

The city also played an important role as the space wherein battles were fought during later phases of the revolutionary process, when the vertical revolution from below had already turned into a civil war. The urban infrastructure provided the rebels with opportunities to succesfully oppose a numerically and technologically superior opponent. The tactics used by rebel forces was finally countered by the Syrian army with the strategy of urbicide, the deliberate destruction of entire urban areas. By doing so the "playground of revolution" and the advantages it held for the rebels was deducted to ruins, which improved the chances of the Syrian army considerably.

Introduction

At the end of 2010 the world became a witness of a concatenation of revolutions, of political cataclysm, in the Middle-East and Northern Africa (MENA-region). After an eruption of anti-government protests in Tunisia more followed quickly in Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, Oman, Jordan and Syria among others (Mirkin, 2013). In some cases regimes resigned, in others they were overthrown, some uprisings faded away and in the case of Syria the outcome of the events is yet unsure.

Revolutions *an sich* are not new nor unique. The difference between the Arab Spring and "the average revolution" and what makes this series of events a rare phenomenon is that it is not one revolution but a whole series of such occurrences. It is not often seen throughout the course of history that a revolutionary wave crosses multiple borders and engulfs an entire region. It has happened before though, between 1810 and 1825 in Latin America, in 1848-1849 in Europe and the last more or less similar case was that of the collapse of most Communist states in Central- and Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1991 (Anderson, 2011).

The affairs in the MENA-region could be of great importance not only for the states themselves, but also for the rest of the world. The phenomenon of changing regimes all over the region will not only affect the Arab World, but also the world as a whole (Rubin, 2006, p. 6). In the post-World War II period the West has managed to keep a strong grip on the Islamic world, but as a result of the current changes in the distribution of power this influence might strongly decrease. The interconnectedness between the Middle East (and Northern Africa) and the West might now openly present itself as there is a strong possibility that events in one region have their effects in another.

The reasons behind Western influence in the region are partly explainable from ideological motives, accompanied with a certain sense of guilt in the case of Israel. The protection of this Jewish state that is surrounded by (to a greater of lesser extent) unfriendly minded Muslim states has always been a priority of the West since WWII and they managed to do so by holding a certain grasp on those neighbouring states.

There are also the ancient economic concerns. Western economies thrive on oil and a large percentage of the global oil reserves are located in countries such as Iran, Saudi-Arabia, Libya and Iraq. For a long time the West favored a stable (and in most cases authoritarian) leader in an oil possessing country above a democratic regime. A democratic country will shift its policies and changes throughout the years and is therefore harder to influence (Anderson, 2011).

The future of the world for a large part depends on the outcomes of the battle between Arab nationalist regimes, Islamist revolutionaries and liberal reformers (Rubin, 2006). A battle that is taking place right now. Although the importance of what happens in the Arab world is widely recognized, knowledge of

Western politicians and scholars on what is exactly happening "over there" seems to fall behind. Therefore this thesis tries to reduce the gap that exists in theories regarding change in the Arab world.

As can be seen it is of great importance to learn more about both the underlying causes and the outcomes of the Arab Spring, as it will definitely have consequences for the global balance of power. As said above the aim of this bachelor thesis is to contribute to the theory regarding the Arab Spring in order to do so. Because we are looking at a phenomenon of considerable size and importance that is quite rare in its existence, it is of great significance that more research on the subject is done. To ensure a better understanding of the Arab Spring this thesis seeks to complement the theoretical view on the subject.

In order to learn more about the concatenation of revolutions we must start with the beginning: what are the causes of this sudden revolutionary wave? Some of the dictators that resigned were in power for more than thirty years. Why are they expelled at this precise moment? A part of the answers to these questions may lay in history. In this paper a comparison will be made at some points with Europe's Revolutionary Year 1848 that shares certain similarities with the Arab Spring. However, the course of events cannot be fully explained by only looking back. In the literature there has been written quite a lot about the actual events. However, forming a theoretical framework on which those events find a firm foundation seems to fall behind. Most theory that has been constructed in order to understand the Arab Spring in a better way is very politically oriented. However, to reduce the analysis of this phenomenon to just political aspects would result in an utter incomplete image. Although the processes cannot be understood properly without some sort of political perspective, a geographical view will definitely shine a different but useful light on the affairs in the MENA-region. Therefore this thesis attempts to broaden the theoretical knowledge about the Arab Spring by focusing primarily on the geographical backgrounds of the revolutionary processes during the Arab Spring. The backgrounds of the causes for revolution and the revolutionary process itself will be analyzed from a geographical point of view. Herein we will mainly focus on the urban factor that played a role in the process, because this, as we will see, is the most important spatial aspect in a revolutionary process.

From a scientific perspective the Arab Spring offers us an interesting and rare phenomenon as a research object. Comparable cases are not often found in history and therefore the opportunity should be seized to research the event while it is still "fresh". The Arab Spring has obviously not seen its end, but it is already clear that this is something "for in the books".

This thesis will consist of a case study of the ongoing revolutionary process in Syria, a country that is affected by the Arab Spring and as a result of that is now dealing with a high-intensity conflict, a civil war. The results of the analysis might be of use in order to reduce the gap that exists in literature when it comes to theoretical backgrounds regarding the Arab Spring. On one hand it is valuable to describe the situation and to focus on the empirical side of the Arab Spring, to simply describe the events. On the other hand,

with a proper theoretical backing this data could become far more interesting and useful. The aim of this thesis will therefore be to create such a theoretical background in order to support existing and future research.

The case study of Syria is chosen for multiple reasons. A complete overview of the geographical backgrounds of the Arab Spring as a whole would be too bulky to make in the relatively small timeframe in which this thesis finds itself. Therefore this one case will be highlighted and the findings will be analyzed in order to sort out whether they are (to some extent) generalizable to other cases of the Arab Spring in the concluding chapter of this paper. The particular case of Syria is chosen because it is an ongoing process at the moment of writing and because of the role Syria plays in the region and all aspects that come with that role. The aims of this research lead us to the following central question:

To what extent can the revolutionary process in Syria be explained from a geographical perspective?

This thesis can basically be divided into four phases: the theoretical explication of key concepts in the theoretical framework, an empirical study of the Syrian revolutionary process, comparing the theory and the empiricism in the analysis and finally a concluding phase. More about the structure of this thesis will be discussed in the Method section.

Method

In this chapter we will briefly discuss the methods and data used to conduct this research. Firstly, there will be an explanation about the design of this research paper. We will explain the structure of this thesis and discuss the choice for the chapters and paragraphs that together will form this thesis.

This thesis can basically be divided into four phases: the theoretical explication of key concepts in the theoretical framework, an empirical study of the Syrian revolutionary process, a comparison of the theory and the empiricism and finally a concluding phase.

The theoretical framework will consist of a description of the key concepts that form a theoretical foundation for the rest of the thesis when put together. The concepts "Arab Spring", "revolution", "revolutionary wave", "uprising" and "geographical causes of revolution" will be extensively discussed in order to form a clear theory. This part of the thesis is completely based on scientific literature from different disciplines, such as geography, political sciences, sociology and history.

The last three chapters form the case study of the Syrian conflict. A case study is a classic en widely used research design within the field of qualitative research. It is a research on a present-day phenomenon with ambiguous borders and wherein multiple sources are used in order to come to a conclusion (Vennix, 2010). According to Peters (in Vennix, 2010, p. 103) a case study is the opposite of a survey-research, as a large amount of characteristics (and their interconnectedness) of a limited amount of research-units is researched. A survey-research is the other way around as in such a case a limited amount of characteristics of a large amount of cases is researched.

A bulky phenomenon as the Arab Spring is difficult to research as a whole. The complexity and size of the case are just too large to research in a thorough way, especially in the relatively small amount of time that stands for this research. Instead of the complete phenomenon "Arab Spring" this thesis will focus on one part (revolution within one state) of the total. A precondition is that the chosen case is representative with respect to other cases within the same phenomenon (Vennix, 2010). It can never be a hundred percent clear whether the chosen case is actually representative, but as there are quite a few similarities between the Syrian revolution and other cases of revolution during the Arab Spring, especially in the initial phases, it is considered to be at least representative enough.

This research will not be conducted as a study "in the field". The main reason for that choice is a lack of time and money to do so and the fact that field research in Syria might not be the safest way to get a bachelor's degree. Therefore this study will mainly consist of desk research. Over the past few years thousands of scientific papers and books, newspaper- and background articles and policy documents have been written about the events in the MENA-region. A selection of these writings will be used to collect the data that is necessary for this research. It will build upon the empirical data collected by others. From this will be seen what the exact course of events was in Syria. This data could be analyzed in different ways. In

this thesis is chosen for a mixture of research methods as elements of both grounded theory and critical discourse analysis could be recognized in the followed approach. The "rules" of these approaches are however not strictly followed, but several aspects are used in order to create an analysis of the Syrian revolutionary process in the most complete way possible.

In the theoretical framework some aspects are partially based on earlier scientific research or important theories and partially derived from the empirical findings of revolutionary processes. This is to a level coherent with the grounded theory approach, which is about finding a theory in the empirical data available. Furthermore, much of the data is analyzed by searching for similarities or differences. This approach could be compared to the critical discourse analysis, although it is some sort of stripped version without extensive coding. In order to write chapter two and three there has extensive reading of hundreds of articles from various sources taken place in order to see the complete story and "to get the full image".

Thus, the second chapter consists of a comprehensive description of the revolutionary process in Syria so far. The aim is to be as complete as possible and in that way discover the causes behind this particular chapter of the Arab Spring. The focus will be on the geographical aspects of the causes for revolution, although it will be necessary to describe non-geographical "seeds of revolution" as well. These factors will however be somewhat more briefly described. They are included in order to form a complete picture and not for later analysis, as we will concentrate on geography.

The third chapter will consist of a comparison of the theory and the empirical findings. The factors that caused the revolution in Syria which we found in the second chapter will be placed against the theoretical background that was formed in the first chapter. By doing so we this chapter will result in an overview of the geographical factors that caused a revolution in Syria.

This will ultimately result in a concluding chapter in which we will create a brief overview of geographical causes that altogether resulted in the start of the revolutionary process in Syria. The geographical causes will also be related to each other and the interconnectedness will be discussed. In order to answer the central question of this thesis there also will be a comparison made in which we will find out to what extent the geographical causes also apply to other countries in the MENA-region.

Chapter One - Theoretical framework

In order to understand the events in the MENA-region, "the Arab World", between January 2011 and today, it is important to explicate what has been going on using some sort of theoretical framework. In this section a theoretical foundation will be laid out, whereupon the empirical findings can be built. The most important concepts found in literature regarding the Arab Spring will be made clear, such as the term "Arab Spring" itself, revolution and revolutionary wave.

First of all, a theoretical view on the central concepts "revolution" and the related term "uprising" will be given, to put forward what the greater phenomenon is wherein the research fits. Secondly, a small section will be dedicated to the concept "revolutionary wave", an overarching phenomenon where the Arab Spring is part of. Finally, a theoretical background will be set out about the geography of revolutions.

The explanation of key concepts will be followed by the explication of the geographical factors that possibly contribute to revolutionary processes and that of the Arab Spring in particular. This part will be based on earlier literature that connects geography to revolution, geographical basic literature and writings about other revolutionary waves.

The key concept of the Arab Spring is revolution. The uprising of the people has caused several regimes in the MENA-region to resign, others were overthrown and in the case of Syria the outcome is yet unknown. The revolutionary wave started in Tunisia and other countries followed one after the other. To have a better understanding of this, we have to find out what is said in the literature about revolutions and if there are possible comparisons that could be drawn with earlier (waves of) revolution(s).

1.1.1. Revolution - Definition

It is not easy to catch all facets of the term "revolution" into one definition. Definitions found in literature slightly alter from each other. The most broad description of what a revolution is, is found in the introduction of Krejci's "Great revolutions compared: The outline of a theory" (1994). In that work Krejci states that the core of the concept could be described in only three words: sweeping dramatic change (p. 6). This statement seems fully logical, however it is a term to broad to use for a decent operationalisation. Other authors use different, more specific definitions. For instance, David Robertson describes a revolution as: "… a violent and total change in a political system which not only vastly alters the distribution of power, but results in major changes in the whole social structure" (In Krejci, 1994, p. 7). Krejci later puts emphasis on the violent aspects of revolution and on the fact that it is a process. In that aspect the definition differs from for instance the Cambridge British English Dictionary, which tells us that revolution is: "a change in the way a country is governed, usually to a different political system and often using violence or war". Scientists rather drop "revolution" as an event and use the term revolutionary process. The main reason for this is that a "revolution" (or revolutionary process) does not consist only of the violent episode that causes regime

change. A revolution does not begin, nor end at that point. The end of a revolution(ary process) is only reached when the seat of power is taken by the revolutionaries and a stable situation is reached. This usually takes some time as most revolutions contain a considerable deal of chaos.

"Force is being used on both sides and not necessarily only within the country involved. The complete overthrow of a government and a change of the political regime, however, may occur several times. Revolution then appears to be not a single event but a protracted period of turbulent, dramatic events; which, as previously stated, may be better styled as a 'revolutionary process'" (Krejci, 1994, p. 7).

In his book (1994) Krejci distinguishes four different kinds of revolutionary processes, as shown in figure 1. According to his theory there are three different forms of revolutionary processes:

- Revolution from above
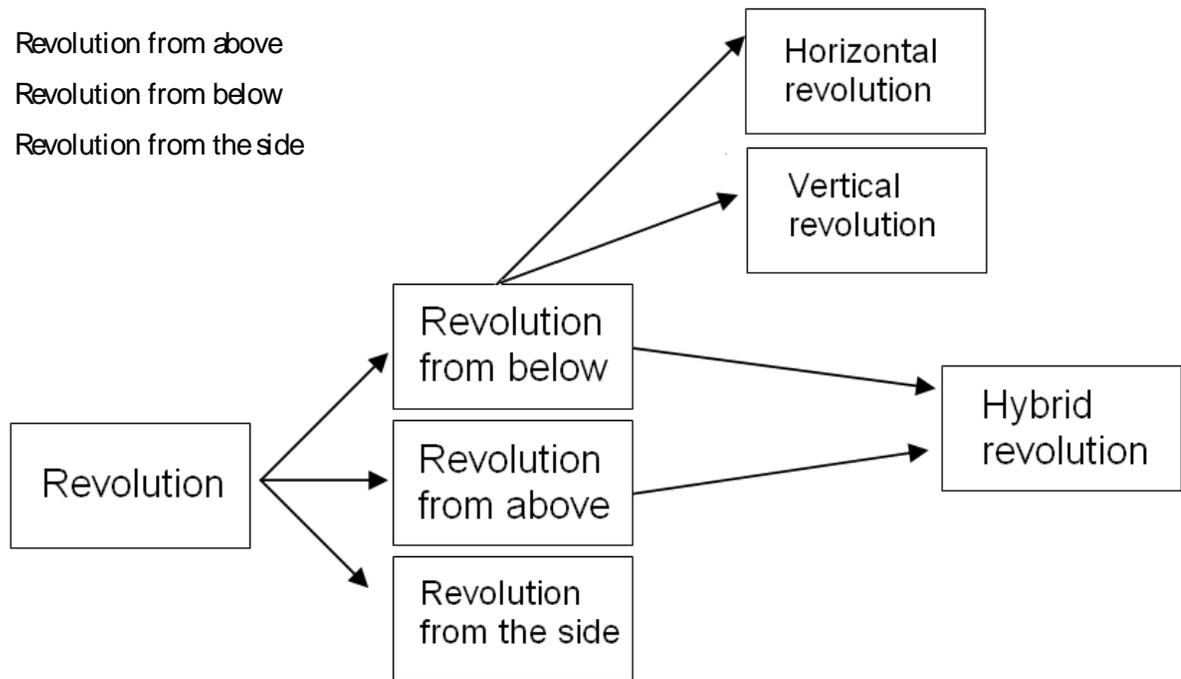- Revolution from below
- Revolution from the side

Figure 1 – Different kinds of revolutionary processes

The first kind of revolution mentioned by Krejci (1994, p. 9) is the revolution from above. This is a revolution that does not find its origins in the people but in (a part of) the government or the military elite. These kinds of revolutions (as far as they can be considered revolutions in the proper sense of the word) are mostly called *coup d'etat*. The power shifts from a particular section of societies elite to another.

Secondly, there is the revolution from below which can be described as the "classic revolution", an uprising of a large part of society against its rulers. This form of revolution can be split up in two sub forms: horizontal and vertical revolution. Horizontal revolutions are revolutions from below wherein the people of one country stand up against the government of another. This is a possibility when a country has some kind of dominant position over the other. Such cases are also known as "secessionist wars" or "wars of liberation". Revolutions from the people against their own sovereign government are called vertical revolutions. A possible outcome of this kind of revolution is civil war. The turn of a vertical revolution

from below into civil war lays not at a specific point, the term is often used when the revolutionaries are (becoming) equal to the government in terms of social status and/or (military) power position.

Krejci also distinguishes a so-called hybrid revolution, which is a mix of the first and second kinds of revolution. In a hybrid revolution a section of the elite take over the government, but they are supported by a large part of the people. The regime is forced to resign by pressure from below as well as above. This subcategory is not considered one of three basic forms of revolution, because of its mixed origin.

The last kind of revolution that Krejci (1994, p. 9) distinguishes is the revolution from the side. This is an exported revolution from one state to the other, via military conquest or infiltration. The adoption of ideas and strategies from a revolution by people of another country is not included in Krejci's definition. A revolution from the side is the transfer of a revolutionary process from one country to the other through deliberate acts to do so by the initial revolutionaries.

1.1.2. **Revolution** - Preconditions and causalities

Charles Tilly reviewed all European revolutions between 1492 and 1992 and came with a working definition that gives us an idea of the basic elements needed for a revolution to unfold. His definition reads as follows:

"*A forcible transfer of power over a state in the course of which at least two distinctive blocs of contenders make incompatible claims to control the state, and some significant portion of the population subject to the state's jurisdiction acquiesces in the claim of each bloc*" (Tilly, 1993 in Krejci, 1994, p. 19).

The underlying cause of every revolutionary process is found in the discrepancy between the vision of the state and that of the group or groups of people who try to overthrow the government. Of course every situation is different and each individual case has to be placed in its own context. Krejci states this in his critique on Pitirim Sorokin, who reviewed "individual disturbances in isolation" and paid no attention to the particular socio-historical and cultural context (Krejci, 1994). Krejci agrees with the political scientist Peter Calvert (in Krejci, 1994, p. 17) that exactly that particular context is of the greatest importance to take into account, because that helps us understand the phenomenon of revolutionary process.

Krejci puts emphasis on the fact that there is no single cause of revolution.

"*Theories that explain revolution in terms of one cause or one issue being at stake are misleading. It is the structure of causation rather than one particular cause or one particular aspect of development which helps us to understand the phenomenon of revolution*" (p. 37).

There is always a structure of causation. A web of causes, one leading to another and altogether those causes, prerequisites and requirements, form the ground from which the revolutionary process arises. A revolution is never caused by for instance a financial crisis or a food shortage. Multiple events and discourses eventually lead to revolution, not one spark.

In literature some underlying causes are mentioned that seem to hold for the grand majority of revolutionary processes throughout history.

Maybe the most important requirement that a revolutionary process needs before it can unfold is that an extraordinary large number of people, who usually prefer to maintain a passive attitude towards politics (Krejci, 1983, p. 213), are ready and willing to go onto the streets and demand the resignation of the government. Citizens have to be prepared to take up arms and risk their lives in the worst scenario. This required mindset is not caused by affairs such as poverty and hunger, but by a general feeling of injustice that is either caused by the government or that it is unable to improve. As Moore stated in Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy:

"Massive poverty and exploitation in and by themselves are not enough to provide a revolutionary situation. There must also be felt injustice built into the social structure, that is, either new demands on the victims or some reason for the victims to feel that old demands are no longer justifiable" (1967, p. 220).

Another quite well-known author and statesman suggests that the majority of the people can be preceded by "those who have the capability and courage to take the initiative and proclaim the will of society" (Qaddafi, 1975, p.10). However, whether the citizens *en masse* gather in front of the presidential palace, or that they are infected with the revolutionary virus by a smaller group of courageous revolutionaries, the fact is that there needs to be a widely felt injustice and the belief that this can be improved. If that particular feeling is absent, people simply will not consider to take part in a revolutionary process.

This is consistent with the concepts "relative deprivation" and (a lack of) vertical social mobility, more general causes of revolution mentioned in the literature. Relative deprivation is about the relative situation of one opposed to that of others. When used in a revolutionary context it is often about a middle class with growing economic means, but with a lack of political opportunities. This middle class feels a discrepancy between their expectations (becoming politically influential because of their improved social status) and the satisfaction of those expectations. This discrepancy is caused by the lack of possible vertical social mobility, a foundation for a healthy society (Pareto, 1965 in Krejci, 1994). People need the opportunity to move upwards in a society. If they are denied that opportunity that means they are stuck in their current situation. This hopelessness will in the end cause the people to stand up against their government. This goes up for all classes but the elite, as the desire for vertical social mobility goes for everyone, the poor, the middle class and the lower elite. The situation in a pre-revolutionary society can be described as follows:

Although people in different classes have the same rights and possibilities as they have always had, the improvement of their prosperity causes them to want more. Such feelings can turn into feelings of hopelessness and injustice and lay the foundation for a revolution.

In order for a revolutionary process to start there has to be a foundation of several levels of dissatisfaction among the people. However, this foundation alone is not enough to spark a revolution. The foundation is often present for many years before revolution breaks out at a certain moment in time. The accelerator for almost every revolution is some kind of trigger, known as the spark. It is an instant event such as an execution or murder by the government, a violent quenching of a demonstration by police forces or the death of an important person (Krejci, 1983). Although economical and demographical factors for instance are of far greater importance for causing a revolutionary process, the spark is the event that directly sets off the revolution. When the underlying causes are considered a pile of wood drenched in petrol, the spark is just the match that sets it all on fire.

1.1.3. Revolution – The revolutionary process

The name "revolutionary process" indicates that the phenomenon consists of multiple consecutive phases. The process has a starting point and then goes through different phases until it reaches an end stage which marks the end of the revolutionary process when a "new, non-revolutionary equilibrium sets in" (Krejci, 1994, p. 38). At that point the revolution is over. In the following paragraph a summary of the different stages of the revolutionary process will be given. These phases are based on Krejci's (1994) model, however they are slightly altered. The most important reason for this is that this paper exclusively focuses on vertical revolutions from below combined with some aspects of revolutions from the side. The model that Krejci presented has a very broad character and is too bulky to use in a correct way in this particular research. For this reason it is slightly narrowed down in a way that it is more useful in the specific case of Syria. We will make use of a more tailor-made model consisting of eight phases in order to research the chosen revolutionary process. To give a correct impression of what is altered in the model that will be used in this paper, Krejci's "missing" parts will be presented between brackets.

1. Foundation (Onset)
This is a pre-revolutionary phase. It describes a period of reformist moves within the society's elites. These reforms are a result of the preconditions discussed in the previous paragraph. New ideas will spread from the elites to the upper, middle and lower classes and the political activation of large parts of society.

2. Institutionalisation
The foundation will lead to institutionalisation of the reformist ideas, as new institutions are created (or existing ones are taken over) to function as a bases for the opposition. At this point the opposition is still reformist-oriented rather than revolutionary.

3. Launch
The government tries to stop the hazardous development. At this point there are two possibilities: either the government succeeds into ending the revolution prematurely or the reformists become revolutionaries and turn to violence themselves and thereby start the revolution.

<u>(Compression)</u>

("The government tries to temporise but eventually finds this development dangerous and attempts to clamp down on it. This phase can be described as the *compression* of what is still a reformist rather than a revolutionary movement.")

<u>(Explosion)</u>

("As this attempt either comes too late or is not carried through resolutely enough (either because of a lack of resources or a lack of fighting spirit, or both), but has immediate effects that are highly irritating, the compression is answered by a violent outburst; this, an *explosion*, is the starting point of the revolution proper.")

<u>4. Fluctuation (Oscillation)</u>

The launch will activate different societal groups that all have their own revolutionary plans. The revolutionary class consists of a variety of groups. It does not only consist out of people from the working class, but also for instance of merchants, artisans, peasants, lawyers and teachers. These internal differences make the revolutionaries an unstable coalition that will ultimately come into conflict with each other (Walzer, 1998). Also the plans for the future or the reason for revolution may differ between the revolutionary groups and this will also contribute to the infighting that will eventually take place at a certain point in the revolutionary process (Krejci, 1994). However, during the fluctuation-phase fighting will not take place yet. The different revolutionary groups reveal their plans and become each other's rivals in their struggle for power. During this phase the power tends to fluctuate between the different groups.

<u>5. Interception</u>

The struggle for power among the revolutionaries is decided in this phase. In this phase armed conflict between revolutionary groups is not impossible. The largest or superiorly armed group will succeed in taking over the power.

<u>6. Consolidation (Tightening)</u>

The group that is in power tries to stay in that position by consolidating its power through the making of a "revolutionary dictatorship" (Krejci, 1994, p. 40). At this point they have to fight both the counter-revolutionaries (the former regime) and the other revolutionary groups. Elements with more radical plans than the leading revolutionaries are eliminated in this phase.

<u>(Expansion)</u>

("A contingent foreign intervention is a challenge that tends to be answered by terror against the potential supporters of the intervention, and eventually, by a counter-attack, which often issues and *expansion* of the revolutionary rule into some neighbouring countries.")

<u>7. Reversal</u>

A large part of the population sees their revolutionary plans not implemented. This mutual disappointment among the opponents of the revolutionary dictatorship makes collaboration possible. Even cooperation with counter-revolutionaries is possible. This phase of the revolutionary process could be considered a step

back, as the post-revolutionary government is either replaced by the pre-revolutionary regime or some of its elements.

(Restoration compromise)

("At that point the revolutionary process takes a different course. Where there was a formal restoration, there is a prolonged period of uneasy compromise between the revolutionary right and supporters of the *ancient regime*")

(Restoration pressure)

("Gradually the *ancient regime* attempts to tilt the balance more and more to their side. This pressure upsets the existing alliances. The revolutionary right refrains from giving further support to the counter-revolutionaries and eventually makes an alliance with the other remaining groups which, in one way or another, supported the revolution.")

8. Consolidation overthrow

Because the original reasons that lead to revolution still exist and the *ancient regime* is actually still in place after all, the remaining revolutionary groups together stage a final coup against the regime. This is called the "consolidation overthrow" or "glorious revolution" (Krejci, 1994, p. 41).

1.2.   Uprising

Although the terms "insurrection", "rebellion", "revolt", "struggle" and "uprising" are often used as synonyms for "revolution", it is of notable importance to make a clear differentiation between those terms in order to compare them to each other. Revolution should be seen as a different process then uprising etc., although there is a strong connection between those concepts. "Insurrection", "rebellion", "revolt", "struggle" and "uprising" could be used as synonyms for each other, but to prevent confusion the term "uprising" will be consequently used in this paper.

A revolutionary process that is ended in an early phase (probably in one of the first four phases) and because of that untimely termination does not reach its goals will be referred to as an uprising. This abortion of the process could have several causes, for instance a smaller revolutionary group, a stronger government or a quick response of the government on growing unrest. In fact an uprising is nothing more than an uncompleted revolutionary process. "A failed attempt at revolution", as Krejci calls it (1994). In this respect an uprising could be seen as being more of an event, rather than a process.

1.3.   Revolutionary wave

The Arab Spring is often referred to as a "revolutionary wave". When the term is searched for with Google more than 17.5 million hits come up and the articles on the first few pages are all about the recent events in the MENA-region. Moreover, the use of the word "wave" to describe certain events is not a new phenomenon. Huntington (1991, in Geddes 1999) described three "waves of democratization"

throughout history. The name stuck. Some researchers claim that the Arab Spring is the fourth wave of democratization; others say it is a continuation of the third wave.

The revolutionary year that struck Europe in 1848 is also often called a revolutionary wave, because also in that case it seemed as if one revolution sparked the other and governments in different countries were forced to resign.

The use of the metaphor "wave" implies that one particular phenomenon spread across all the countries involved. Of course this is partially true as anti-government protests occurred in many countries and the same techniques of mobilization and sometimes even the same symbols were used (Gelvin, 2012). However, this generalization ignores the fact that each uprising or revolution had its own particular causes, goals and ways of protesting. Similarities can easily be found and therefore it is easy to see the phenomenon as a "wave" that "engulfs" an entire region, but differences between the events in different countries also exist and should not be ignored.

1.4.   Geography and revolutions

Earlier research suggests that every revolutionary process has certain geographical, socio-historical and cultural causes (Calvert, 1970 in Krejci, 1994). This thesis is an attempt to find out what those particular causes were in the case of Syria. In order to do so, the logical first step is to look at the geographical aspects of the causes of revolutionary processes in general, before we move towards a more specific and thorough analysis of the geography behind the Syrian uprising in the third chapter. Some of the following geographical factors that are believed to have some kind of causal link to revolutionary processes are found in literature regarding a specific revolution in history. Others are found in literature that looks towards "revolution" from a more theoretical point of view. From this literature review the three most important geographical factors have been derived. The first and most important factor is the combination of demography, urbanisation and economy, seen as an individable trinity of factors that mutually influence each other. The other factors that will be used in the analysis of the Syrian revolutionary process are food shortage and culture. At the end of this paragraph a model is constructed out of these factors. The Syrian revolutionary process will be reviewed on the basis of this model in the next chapter.

1.4.1.   Geography and revolutions – Demography, Urbanisation and Economy

In the historical analysis of the 1848 Revolutions in Europe (Jones, 1981) quite some emphasis is put on the demographical factors that were believed to have lead to the revolutions in different European countries. The most important of these demographic underlying causes are the large percentage of the population living in an urban environment, rapid further urbanisation and the composition of the urban population. This focus on urban aspects of revolution is fully in line with what Henri Lefebvre referred to as the "urban revolution" or "révolution urbaine. According to the French urbanist the city as an entity holds

revolution as an intrinsic feature. Revolution is therefore inextricably connected to "the city" (Lefebvre, 1996). These aspects will be further elaborated on under "Urbanisation".

The second most important factor that Jones mentions in his book (1981) is the division of labour and the overall economic position of the population, which could both be linked to "urbanisation". Around 1848 the rise of the middle class and the relative deprivation that this class encountered was a factor that fed the need people felt for a change and what eventually made them face the government. A comparable situation can be seen in the MENA-region in the years prior to the Arab Spring. This and other aspects of the economical side of demography will be further discussed under "Economy".

1.4.2. Geography and revolutions – Urbanisation

According to Lefebvre the "urban society" is the end phase of a developing society, which all societies should strive for as all people hold a "right to the city". That means the right to make use of "the city" to fulfil ones need for qualitative growth of his personal life, by "enabling the full and complete usage of these moments and places" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 179). To a certain degree this is an utopian situation where the social needs of people are to the utmost supported by the economical and political sphere.

In many cases there is a notable discrepancy between what the citizens of a society strive for (to make use of their right to the city) and the support of their pursuit by the government, the political sphere. In order to reach the phase of "urban society" the help of the government is necessary, because it is considered essential that the spatial planning of society is "oriented towards social needs" (Lefebvre, 1991, 178). When the road to the "urban society" is blocked by an unwilling government the only way to reach it is by revolution, or as Lefebvre puts it (1991, p. 179): "Only the taking in charge by the working class of planning and its political agenda can profoundly modify social life and open another era.." In order to create a society that gives people the right to the city the collective is forced to make use of its future right to begin with, as that is the only way to alter society. Because urban- and societal reform in themselves hold a revolutionary core, the ever developing society and therefore society itself is intrinsically revolutionary.

Building up to the 1848 Revolutions there was a large wave of urbanisation to the larger European cities. Eventually the cities became "the stage of revolution", as people left the rural areas to *en masse* come to the city. This group consisted mainly of young men from the working class. The working class life was noted for its brutality at that time and the large group of young men was an ideal "revolutionary army" (Jones, 1981).This supports Lefebvres theory that a revolution needs the city to take place and the city itself is also partly causing that same revolution. According to various sources the same process, or at least a quite similar process, lead to the outbreak of revolutions throughout the MENA-region.

A city as the motor or catalyser behind a revolutionary process could be measured on different scales, on both micro- and macro level. When we look at the urban aspects of a revolution on the micro level this

means we look at the actual revolutionary events taking place in the city streets and on the squares. The city functions as the "playground" wherein the revolution takes place. The urban aspects of revolution on macro level are based on the city as an entity, a phenomenon that in itself holds the preconditions for revolution. Lefebvre (1970, in Boudreau, 2007) calls this "the urban society", the network of social, political and economic relations that make the city. These two interpretations of the concept "city" fit in the geographical distinction between *space* and *place*. We can categorize the city as the playground of revolution as *space*, the "objective" collection of buildings, streets and squares. When we look at the city as an urban society with all its interconnected aspects (and the subjective meanings they hold towards the citizens), that are rooted in that specific part of *space* (Agnew, 2011), it should be referred to as *place*. It is "the terrain where basic social practices – consumption enjoyment, tradition, self- identification, solidarity, social support and social reproduction, etc. - are lived out. As a moment of *space*, where everyday life is situated" (Merrifield, 1993).

1.4.3. **Geography and revolutions** – Economy

A modern urban society is a network wherein social, political and economical aspects constantly interact with each other and thus all three of these elements determine the lives of citizens to some level. In a globalising world with the market economy as the norm "the economy" plays an increasingly important societal role. Especially when the economy is weak the negative effects it has on society can be decisive. This can for instance be seen in Europe the past five years. A worldwide poor economical situation definitely has its effect on countries in the MENA-region (Mirkin, 2013). The negative effects produced in the economical sphere will have their outcomes in the social, urban and political sphere as well. Therefore it is of great importance that we also consider "the economy" as a momentous factor and insert it into the analysis.

1.4.4. **Geography and revolutions** – Food shortage

It is arguable that this factor should be considered as a part of the demographical, urban or economical factor, as it definitely has economical and urban consequences. In this research however food shortage is seen as an external factor that influenced the geographical trinity (demography, urbanisation and economy). Therefore the choice is made to implement the factor food shortage as a separate factor that influenced the geographical trinity.

An often mentioned cause for the Revolutionary Year is the food shortage that hit Europe in 1848 and the years before. Because potato crops had been destroyed by a disease and potatoes were the most important source of calorie intake for Europeans at that time, Europe encountered a serious food shortage (Jones, 1981). This eventually led to an increase in urbanisation, as people escaped the poor countryside in a pursuit for a better life in the city, which as can be seen above also increased the chance of a revolutionary process to break out.

1.4.5. **Geography and revolutions** – Culture

Gelvin (2012) stated that the shared culture and history in the MENA-region also was a factor that in some way contributed to the unfolding of the Arab Spring. The history of the region that, especially in the last decades, is filled with revolutions, violence, war, oppression and foreign intervention has in a way formed the people. According to Gelvin (2012) the fact that many people in the MENA-region are more or less accustomed to violence, is a key element for the development of the revolutionary wave in the region.

1.4.6. **Geography and revolutions** - Focus

As can be seen all of these geographical causes cannot be seen apart from each other. They form the "web of causes" that was mentioned earlier. This interconnected geographical factors form the foundation on which a revolutionary process is built, the ground from which it arises.
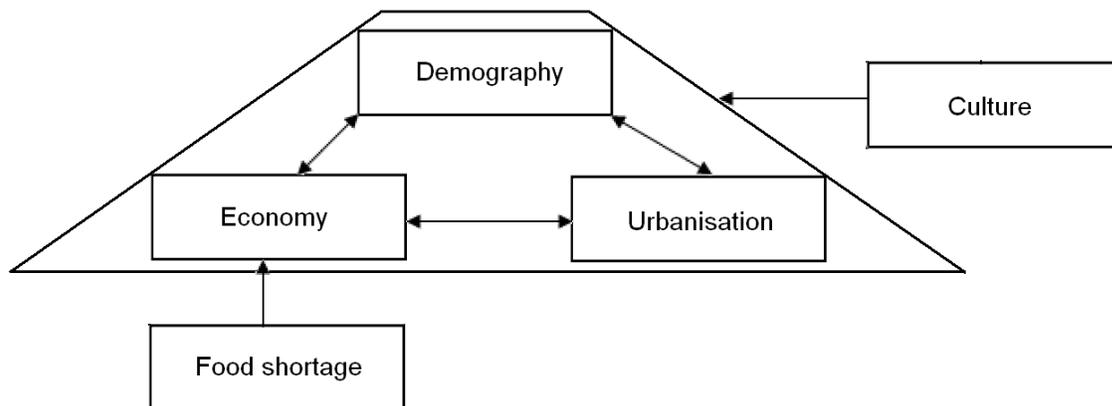

Figure 2 – Geographical factors of the Syrian revolutionary process

One set of factors seems to hold the most importance and could be considered essential for a revolution to unfold itself. These factors are the triangle of urbanisation, demography and economy. These factors are intertwined with each other and externally influenced by both "culture" and the accidental factor "food shortage" as we will see in figure 2 and will learn in the next chapter.

The "stages of revolution", cities were the places where the actual revolutions, the fighting and dying, took place. In order to understand a revolution it is essential to understand their spatial context, in other words to understand the role of the entity "city" in the revolutionary process. As can be read in the paragraphs about demography, economy and urbanisation these three factors are strongly connected. For that reason we see these three aspects as one indivisible trinity.

Chapter Two - The Syrian revolutionary process

In this chapter the recent revolutionary process in Syria will be laid out. This is done so we can analyze it and determine its geographical aspects in the next chapter. In order to structure this chapter and to describe the process in the clearest possible way it will be divided into the different phases of a revolutionary process as shown on pages 13-15. The events that took place in Syria in each of these phases will then be described. Because some phases overlap, the description of the revolutionary process will not be entirely chronological.
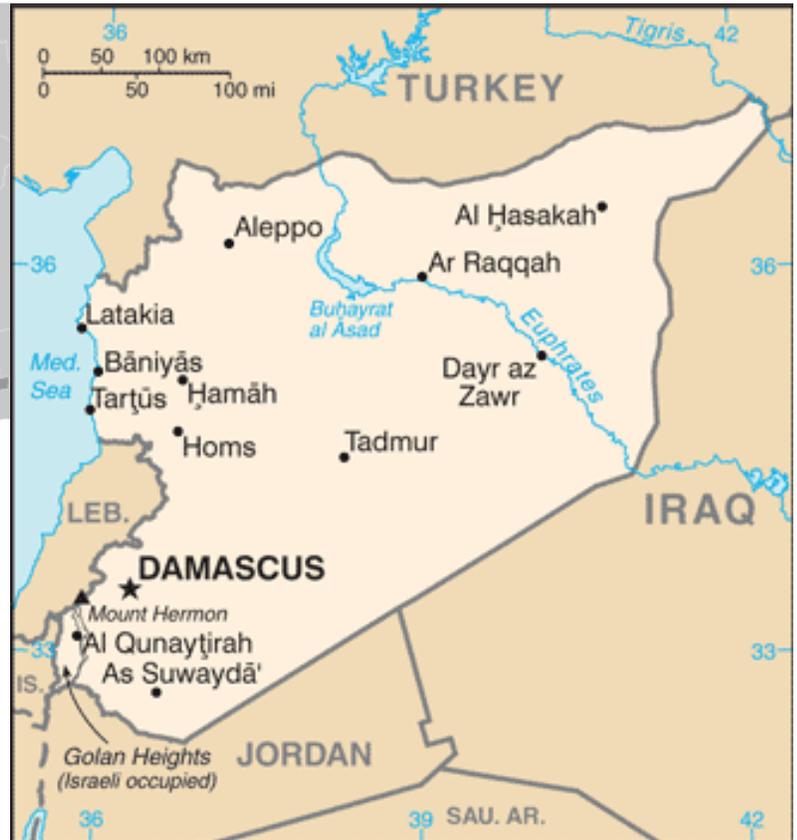
Figure 3 – Location Syria. Source: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html

Figure 4 – Map of Syria. Source: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html

2.1. Foundation

A combination of political, economical and demographical factors paved the road for a revolutionary process in Syria. The Syrian people have lived under the authoritarian Assad regime for more than forty years and have not been able to speak themselves out against it (Manfreda, n.d.). Although the Ba'ath party originated out of ideas of anti-imperialism and social reform and was popular among the people of Syria in the 1950's and 1960's it now only holds the same name as the original party. The ideals that formed Ba'ath

fifty years ago are vanished and it is now merely a facade as it is nothing more than a dictatorial regime. President Assad uses the legacy of his father to legitimize his authoritarian regime. The result of fifty years of Ba'athism is a very uneven division in the Syrian economy. Cronyism and corruption more and more caused dissatisfaction under the population and thus contributed to the feelings of injustice.

The poor economic situation of Syria is only made worse by the huge growth of the Syrian population in the last decades. The annual growth rate in Syria is almost twice as fast as the average world rate (2.8% vs. 1.5%) (Mirkin, 2013, p. 12). The Arab World as a whole is now dealing with a growing "class" of the youth because of this population boom. "*A history of high fertility in the Arab region, six children per woman during the 1980s, has produced a youth bulge aged 15 to 24 years*" (Mirkin, 2013, p. 7). The enormous youth unemployment (three times as high as the total unemployment) is the result of (inter)national economical problems and a surplus of young people on the labour market. The entire region is affected by the global economic crisis. Economic problems in other parts of the world affect the export of products from the MENA-region. As a result of a poor economical situation and a huge amount of young citizens simply too few jobs exist to provide all people aged 15-24 with a job. About a third of the Arab youth cannot find a job; there is no real difference between high- and low educated youngsters. The poor economic state of the region is a very important underlying factor of the regional unrest. It is also believed that if the situation does not get better (which is a likely situation), this "generation in waiting" (Mirkin, 2013, p. 25) will continue to play a destabilizing role for the coming years.

The relative deprivation felt by young people as a result of that situation cannot be seen apart from the unrest that engulfed the region. The unemployment led to dissatisfaction with the entire situation among the youth. This resulted in a large migration stream to the larger cities such as Damascus, Aleppo and Homs. Rural-urban migration is a common spatial progress in the MENA-region, or as Mirkin put it:

"*Many countries in the Arab Region are experiencing large population movements from rural to urban areas, as young men and women leave tedious agricultural employment in search of "bright city lights" and supposedly more reliable and better paid urban jobs*" (Mirkin, 2013, p. 16)

Mainly because of this process, urbanization levels have grown over the past years. In Syria for instance, the urban population grew from 4,1 million in 1980 to 11,3 million in 2010, while the total population "only" doubled from 8,9 million to 20,4 million (Mirkin, 2013, pp. 12 and 16). History shows that the specific category of the Syrian population that took part in the migration process (young people and particularly young men) are the ideal "revolutionary army". In combination with the already mentioned high unemployment these expanding cities did become a sort of time bombs that had to "go off" at some point. As large concentrations of poor and unsatisfied people lived together in the cities the provision of housing became insufficient, unrest grew and it was easier for this concentrated group to act together than

it was for people living in rural areas. Eventually those urban citizens did act together in many cities throughout the MENA-region and this resulted in the Arab Spring.

Another, to some extent coincidental, factor that contributed to both the increasing urbanisation and negative feelings towards the regime is the persistent drought that forced people to move from rural to urban areas. Millions of people have been affected by the drought that caused crop failures and water shortages among other problems over the last five years. Droughts caused poor wheat harvests and inflating bread prices (Sternberg, 2012). This led to anger and unrest among civilians. During the Revolutionary Year discussed earlier, food shortages proved to be of great influence towards the outbreak of the various European revolutions. It is believed that also in this modern time something as trite as food shortage can still (indirectly) lead to revolution.

All of these factors can be found in multiple countries throughout the region. The dissatisfaction of the people was not unique for Syria; in fact there was an overall sense of dissatisfaction with the government in most parts of the Middle East and Northern Africa. These negative feelings came together at one moment when a frustrated young man set himself on fire on December 17 in Sidi Bouzid in Tunesia. That marked the eruption of already simmering dissatisfaction about the government and protest broke out throughout the whole country. This was noticed in other countries in the MENA-region and protests followed quickly in Jordan, Oman, Yemen and Egypt. The revolutionary wave hit Syria a few months after it all began in Tunesia.

2.2. Institutionalisation

When the political position of Bashar al-Assad seemed to weaken for a brief moment in 2005, after he had to retreat the Syrian army from Lebanon because of the great amount of diplomatic pressure from the international community, the silent opposition groups of Syria came together in Damascus to unify themselves into a broad coalition of opposition. Five groups with different backgrounds formed the Damascus Declaration. Those organizations were the Democratic National Rally in Syria, Kurdish Democratic Alliance in Syria, the Committees for the Revival of Civil Society, the Kurdish Democratic Front in Syria and Al Mustakbal (Future) Party. The new coalition called for the establishment of a democratic Syrian regime and emphasized the equality of all components of the Syrian people and freedom for their various "religious, national and social affiliations" (Syrian Observer, 2012). The Damascus Declaration itself ends with the call " … to work to end the stage of despotism. We declare our readiness to offer the necessary sacrifices for that purpose, and to do all what is necessary to enable the process of democratic change to take off, and to build a modern Syria, a free homeland for all of its citizens, safeguard the freedom of its people, and protect national independence" (Damascus Declaration, 2005). This call might have been the seed, planted in 2005 that grew into the anti-regime protests less than six years later.

When the number of protests in Syria increased, it quickly became clear that the popular uprising was not to have a future unless the opposition, which was spread all over Syria, organized itself. The first institutions that emerged out of the uprising were the Local Coordination Committees. Those were mostly decentralized organizations that spread their messages through the Internet and staged huge protests via social networks. There was some sort of central committee that held control over the different committees. The quick emersion of the LCC's was enabled by their basis of networks of friends, families and colleagues and their thoughts of dissidence they shared for many years (Shadid, 2011). Especially during the early stages of the Syrian revolutionary process the LCC's formed an important factor, "the organizational backbone", which helped spreading the revolutionary ideas throughout the whole of Syria (Lavender, 2012).

Although the importance of the LCC's cannot be denied it mainly operates as some sort of underground movement. The opposition parties in Syria needed a coalition in the tradition of the Damascus Declaration, which had been severely weakened by the government since 2005. In September 2011 the Syrian National Council was formed as the future governance alternative to the Assad regime and the official coalition of the various opposition groups that already existed before or were created during the uprising in Syria. The opposition coalition was formed out of the Damascus Declaration, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, members of Local Coordination Committees and smaller nationalist or ethnic based (Assyrian and Kurdish) groups (Lavender, 2012). This official political opposition began to fall apart from the day it was created. It contained such a variety of ideologies and ideas for the Syrian future that a large disunity actually was the only logical outcome from the start. The SNC exists for a large part of Sunni Muslim parties and cooperation with Christian, Alawite and the important opposition forces of the Kurds proved to be difficult (Lavender, 2012).

The SNC did not result in the unified alliance of opposition groups that was foreseen. The conflict in Syria evolved in a civil war and the opposition would certainly not succeed in defeating the regime when not unified. The various opposition groups again tried to form a solid coalition. In November 2012 the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (NCSROF) was formed in Doha, Qatar. The SNC was integrated into the new organization. In order to create a more stable coalition the leader of the organization, Sheikh Ahmad Moaz al-Khatib, is a former Imam who has been active in the opposition since 2011 and has no ties to political or religious groups. The neutral position of the president of the National Coalition should ensure a stable cooperation between the different ethnic, religious and ideological groups (Al Arabiya, 2012). At the moment of writing the NCSROF is still the most important collection of opposition groups in Syria.

At a certain point the violence imposed on the protesters rose to such a level that the opposition had to supersede their mass protests for armed violence, as we will read in the next paragraph. This phase in the revolutionary process asked for different institutions, military instead of merely political. Due to the

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increasingly horrifying nature of their orders soldiers of the Syrian Army deserted and formed an organized armed branch of the revolutionaries under the command of the deserted Colonel Riyad al Asaad, the Free Syrian Army. As many other parts of the opposition the FSA is highly decentralized. It consists of more than a hundred semi-autonomous battalions which each organise their own guerrilla style attacks on the Syrian army. According to the CIA World Fact Book "there are also hundreds of local groups that organize protests and stage armed attacks" (2013). Some of these local groups are loosely affiliated with the FSA. They sometimes fight under the flag of the FSA and sometimes under their own. Other groups fight Assad strictly for their own goal. Most of these particular groups are the so-called Islamist brigades, who fight for their religious beliefs and to spread their radical ideologies (Lavender, 2012). In order to align the different operations and to prevent counterproductive actions among the various battalions the FSA has a high command based in Turkey (Lavender, 2012). There will be further elaborated on the FSA in the next paragraph. As the formation of the FSA obviously took place during the "launch" phase of the revolutionary process it might seem somewhat odd to put it in the "institutionalisation" section. However, the way in which it was created can be seen as a part of the institutionalisation phase that continued into the launch phase. This example clarifies the fact that a revolutionary process is a continuous process and that the various phases contain some overlap.

2.3.   Launch

On the 18th of March 2011 a group of young people was arrested and put in jail by Syrian police after spray painting the "Arab Spring-mantra" (Ash-sha'b yurīd isqāṭ an-niẓām/ the people want the regime to fall) on a wall (Wilkinson & Thompson, 2012). This anti-government chant was frequently heard during earlier protests in Tunis, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen and Libya.

The event followed earlier smaller and peaceful protests in the Syrian capital of Damascus in the wake of the Arab Spring (Williams, 2011). Syria had been ruled with an iron fist by the Ba'ath party for decades and the upheavals in other parts of the MENA-region made the Syrian people realize that they might be able to change this (Ghosh, 2011). Several demonstrations erupted in Damascus and other cities throughout the country as people called for political reforms. The arrest of the young citizens of Dara'a, caused other residents of the town, which is located south of Damascus, to stand up against their regime. At the third day of protest this local uprising turned violent and a statue of the former Syrian president was destroyed and several official buildings were attacked and set on fire. As a result the army came down hard on the protest and several protesters were shot and killed (Abouzeid, 2011). In order to stop the protesters from communicating with each other and with the outside world the mobile phone connections were cut. The arrest of the group of teens was the spark that "set fire to the Syrian revolution", from that point on the chain of events proved to be unstoppable. The initial uprising in Dara'a in its turn caused anti-government protest throughout the whole of Syria. What made this protest different from earlier protests was the reaction of security forces. In the weeks before this particular protest only less-lethal weapons such as

sticks, teargas and water cannons were used against the protesting crowds. In this case the government decided to make use of firearms in order to break the resistance. This sudden aggravation of violence made the reform minded people in Syria only more determined that the authoritarian government had to leave. The increase of violence used by security forces also contributed to an escalation of the degree of violence of the protests, because from this moment on there have been an increasing number of reports of armed protesters that answered the army's gunfire (Kahn, 2011).

Each Friday the Syrian people were called to take part in mass protests after the Friday prayers. However the government had already shown that they were willing to use lethal force, tens of thousands of protesters went out on the streets on the 25th of March, the 1st, the 8th, the 15th and eventually on the 22nd of April. This became the bloodiest day in the now five-week-old Syrian uprising so far as more than a hundred people were killed by security forces that day while protesting in Azra, Dara'a, Douma, Homs, the capital city of Damascus and many more towns and cities in Syria (Shadid, 2011).

On April the 25th and the days that followed the violence climaxed when the government decided to cut the water, power, and phone lines to Dara'a and to send in tanks, helicopters, a few hundred to a few thousand soldiers (according to which source is used) and rooftop snipers in order to break the revolutionary spirit in the cradle of the uprising (Shadid, 2011). Again the reaction of the government was more violent and lethal then it was before. This was the first time that armoured vehicles and heavy weapons were used to end local rebellions. During this operation the first messages reached the outside world about military commanders who refused to carry out this kind of operations and the defection of a reasonable number of soldiers of the Syrian army. From this point on the military was not longer used just to prevent or quell popular protests, instead the army was deployed to besiege entire towns and cities.

Assad persisted in the use of heavy military equipment in his attempts to stop the ongoing revolutionary process and in early May tanks were send into Homs, which is the third largest city of Syria and the smaller towns of Baniyas and Saqba. Later that month Al-Rastan and Talbiseh were besieged. Despite the increased crackdown and the enormous presence of police- and army forces in all major cities in Syria, the protests only grew larger and stronger (Daragahi, 2011). This is also indicated by the fact that large protests also broke out in Syrias' largest city, Aleppo, at the end of May as a reaction on the brutal actions which were carried out by the army over the last month.

During June the repression of the protests only grew further as people were reportedly killed by helicopter gunships, tanks, artillery and shot on sight by Syrian soldiers. Violent events took place in Hama, Rastan, Jsr al-Shugur, Aleppo, Damascus and other cities. Not only the violence against the protesters increased, the protesters themselves also more often turned to violent measures as a reaction on the military actions. In Jsr al-Shugur 120 security forces were killed in an ambush carried out by "unknown gunmen", whom could be armed protesters or defected soldiers (Muir, 2011).

The 17th of June was called the "Friday of Saleh al-Ali" after the commander of the Syrian rebellion against the French Mandate in the 1920's. It was the largest day of protesting as tens of thousands of people protested in Dara'a, Deir al-Zor, Homs, Hama and other cities. A week later on Friday the 24th the largest protest so far occurred in Hama when 200,000 people went out to demonstrate against the regime. From this point on the revolutionary spirit seemed like it could only grow larger. A week later mass protests broke out in the thus far relatively peaceful Aleppo and the protest in Hama grew to an astonishing 500,000.

During the month of July the violence increased even further and every violent day was retaliated with even larger protests by the opposition. The army's brutalities seemed to take on even harsher forms when Syrian tanks opened fire on densely populated parts of the city of Homs and killed at least forty citizens (Al Jazeera, 2011). No longer were the military operations of tactical nature, the regime apparently decided to reign down terror on its nationals. However, the will of the people had proven to be too strong to break, not even by force. The government proved to be incapable of terminating the revolutionary process that unfolded itself. As the regime was becoming more and more uncertain of their future, desperate measures are being taken in order to end the revolutionary process. Military commanders for instance have more than once ordered their soldiers to shoot (unarmed) civilians on sight (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

Several military commanders and a reasonable number of soldiers defected from the Syrian army as they disagreed with the increasing amount of violence inflicted to the protesters. On the 29th of July a group of several hundreds of these defectors declared themselves to be the Free Syrian Army and at this point an organized military opposition against Assad was born. A month later an organized political opposition, the Syrian National Council, was formed out of a large number of smaller opposition cells. They want to "unite its [the opposition] efforts in creating an all-inclusive representative body for the nation. The goal of this body is to support the Syrian people's Revolution and their struggle for freedom, dignity, and democracy" (Syrian National Council, n.d.). The organization consists of reform minded democrats, Muslim organizations and Kurds (BBC News, 2011).

In the remaining months of 2011 Assad's regime continued to react violently on every protest raised against it. However, as the months passed by the opposition's military branch, the Free Syrian Army, grew larger. At last the opposition was able to answer on the violent acts committed by the Syrian military (Issacharoff & Harel, 2011). Between August and December there have been reports of ambushes on military convoys, assassinations of military commanders, the conquering of certain city districts and attacks on military strongholds carried out by the FSA. They used urban guerilla tactics and put their minimal means to full use. FSA soldiers were trained in this type of warfare by Croatian, Serbian and Kosovar mercenaries (Tomas, 2012) and possibly others as well. As the conflict prolonged the foreign interference increased. During this stage of the revolutionary process the city of Homs became the center of the

opposition and as a result of that formed the stage for daily clashes between the FSA and security forces loyal to Assad.

The tendency first shifted from popular protests in cities around Syria to the siege of those cities and at this point shifts to a form of urban warfare. Although the FSA achieves small successes, the regime proves to be resilient and victory is still a dot on the horizon. Protesters have been killed by the thousands over the last months and the military still controls most of the countries cities.

Also in the first six months of 2012 there seems to be a decrease in peaceful mass protests and an increase in armed rebellion against the regime. The FSA relies on guerilla warfare and hit-and-run tactics and thus succeeds in small victories that are often quickly undone by the superiorly equipped Syrian Army. When the FSA for instance took over an Air Force missile base, the army was able to take it back before the heavy weapons the FSA was after could be stolen. That is basically how the uprising evolves. The opposition seems to hold out and they surely harm the regime to a certain degree, but the general assumption is that they just do not achieve large enough victories to make a real difference. With the stolen, homemade or black market bought weapons that they possess they are not able to do something against the Airforce and heavy armor that Assad uses against the uprising. Assad keeps using armored vehicles and large amounts of soldiers to keep control of Syrian cities. In January 2012 hundreds of people had been killed in cities as Damascus, Homs and Hama when the Syrian army besieged (parts of) these cities and fought the FSA in what witnesses called "urban warfare" (Oweis & Karouny, 2012).

In an attempt to end the revolutionary process the government increased the violence in the tactics they used. In February there was the Homs massacre, where 400 people were killed when the army launched an artillery bombardment on the city. Also the massacres in Houla and Al-Qubair show that the regime is taking desperate measures to stay in power. In those two cities hundreds of people (more the largest part women and children) were executed on the streets and in their houses by militias loyal to Assad (Nebehay, 2012).

This violent approach possibly makes things only worse. Protesters do not longer call for a regime change in a peaceful way and slogans about peace are making place for the call for "a revolt with bullets and Kalashnikovs" (Al Jazeera, 2012). During July the fighting between the FSA and government troops intensified further and heavy battles were fought in the two major cities of Syria, Damascus and Aleppo. On the 18th of July a number of high placed government officials were killed in a suicide attack on a government building (Al Jazeera, 2012). This event showed that as the fighting prolonged, the rebels were taking more desperate measures. However, not only the rebels had to rely more on unusual tactics, government forces also changed their tactics during this phase of the conflict. During the continuation of the conflict the rebels improved their organization and acquired heavier and more sophisticated weaponry. The answer of the regime was an increase in their use of fighter jets and gunships. These heavy weapons

were originally designed for use in a major conflict with a foreign enemy (Israel) and the sheer fact that the Syrian regime utilizes this part of its arsenal against its own people means the regime is losing absolute control on the revolution (Chivers, 2012).

Aleppo has seen almost a year of heavy fighting and at the moment of writing the FSA is in control of most parts of the city. All routes in- and out of the city are controlled by rebel fighters and according to experts it will be only a matter of time before all government forces are either captured, killed or retreated from the city (NDTV, 2013).

The battle for Damascus was of shorter duration and its outcome was in favor of the government. Between July and September 2012 heavy fighting took place in the capital, but as the fighting prolonged the Syrian army was able to force the rebels out of most parts of the city. The large military presence in Damascus, along with the use of heavy weapons such as tanks, attack helicopters, fighter jets and artillery concluded in a victory for the Syrian army. A rebel interviewed by a Western news agency said: "Fighter jets to us are now as common as birds in the sky", pointing at the excessive use of heavy weaponry by the government. After the recapture of the capital city the rebels stated that they would now fall back on guerilla tactics and hit-and-run operations against security forces (USA Today, 2012). Although the city is recaptured by the government, firefights, heavy shelling and airstrikes still take place in the suburbs, resulting in dozens of deaths daily.

In the first five months of 2013 the uprising against the Syrian regime has entered its third year. Since its beginning more than 80,000 people have been killed, more than a million people fled to neighbouring countries and around four million people are internally displaced (United Nations, 2013). These numbers are believed to keep increasing in the coming months. The fighting between rebels and the Syrian army and the "collateral damage" wherein these battles result make up the largest part of the death toll. Several dozen to a few hundred people, mainly civilians, die every day as a result of the inaccurate tactics the Syrian army now uses against rebel fighters. Rumors about the use of chemical weapons also increasingly come to light since the beginning of this year.

A small number of deaths are the result of fighting between the various opposition groups. The numbers are minuscule if compared to the amount of civilian deaths that the regime is responsible for and the number of rebels and Syrian soldiers killed in action. However, the fact that infighting is taking place reveals that the "interception phase" has been reached in the Syrian revolutionary process.

2.4.   Fluctuation

The Syrian opposition can be divided roughly into three groups: democrats, Islamists and ethnic groups (notably Kurds). Since the NCSROF has been created there seems to be a struggle for power in the political opposition. A part of the opposition still wants a new and democratic Syria, but the voice of Islamist groups

(the Muslim Brotherhood as their main voice) became stronger over the past months. There has also been an increase in foreign fighters in Syria, who fight for the Islam. The Muslim Brotherhood faced increasing criticism as the organization constantly tried to increase their power inside the coalition (Hassan, 2013). Their ideas also reach the various brigades of the FSA and there have been reports of commanders chanting radical slogans (Ditz, 2013). As a growing part of the opposition now seems to fight for an Islamic state while another part fights for democracy, future infighting seems to be an increasing possibility.

Besides the different ideas between the secularists and the Islamists there is another group that has a different view for the future. The Kurds are in power of large parts of the Kurdish regions that have always been tightly controlled by Assad. The ethnic group has always wanted more autonomy in their regions and now see a possibility. When Assad is defeated they want their own piece of Syria and that is not the future that both the secularist and the Islamist movements have in mind (Lavender, 2012).

As the secularists and the Islamists are the largest opposing parties within the opposition against the Syrian regime itself, these two sides will probably become each other's enemies in the future. The Kurds are a relatively small group and, although they are a force that must be taken into account, the struggle for power during the revolution will probably take place between the other two groups. However, as the Kurds have their own plan with the future of their part of Syria it is a distinct possibility that they will come into conflict with one or both of the other parties after the current regime has fallen.

2.5. Interception

Among the varied groups of revolutionaries it is not yet decided who is in power. Small street battles between rebel groups have commenced, but those were small scale and seemed to originate more out of material interests than real "struggles for power" (Enders, 2013).The struggle for power has yet to commence. Although tensions are certainly rising between groups that fight for different outcomes of the revolution, their common enemy the regime still binds them somewhat together. Assad remains the undefeated enemy of the Syrian people and in that role he creates a certain balance among the revolutionaries. Tensions between radical Muslims who fight their Jihad against Assad and groups who strive for democracy and a free Syria are rising (Kouwenhoven, 2013). They however hold a mutual goal and they can still be of use to each other. In an interview of the Brown Moses blog with FSA Colonol Aqidi the latter stated: "I have good relations with all of them [Islamist battalions] and I am communicating with them as long as they fight against the Assad regime."

From this we can conclude that the revolutionary process in Syria still finds itself in the earliest stages of the Interception phase and will probably stay in that same phase as long as the Syria regime is not overthrown. For that reason we will drop the last three phases of a revolution as described on pages 14 and 15 consolidation, reversal and consolidation overthrow, as these phases are not yet reached.

Chapter Three - Analysis

In this chapter we will take the overview of the last chapter and look at the geographical aspects "hidden inside it" once again, combining it with aspects of the concept "revolutionary process" as discussed in the theoretical framework. The previous chapters will be put together and in the end the revolution in Syrian shall be explained from a geographical point of view.

Firstly, the type of revolution will be defined, making use of the definitions presented in the theoretical framework. Then the factors that caused the revolutionary process will be highlighted, mainly focussing on the geographical aspects of these factors. Finally, the geography of the course of the revolution will be discussed in this chapter.

3.1.   Definition

In Syria the revolutionary process originated from the lower parts of society. It was not initiated by parts of the Syrian elite living abroad or by the political, military or economical top in the country. The people of Syria "simply" stood up against their regime in order to change things. That automatically makes clear that we are dealing with a "revolution from below". In the theoretical framework was put forward that Krejci splits up a revolution from below into two sub forms: the horizontal and vertical revolution, the former being "secessionist wars" and the latter being uprisings of the people against their own sovereign government. Looking at Syria it is fairly obvious that the country is dealing with a vertical revolution. In that sense it is a "classic revolution", an uprising of a large part of society against its rulers. The Syrian revolutionary process should thus be categorized as a "vertical revolution from below". As put forward earlier, a possible outcome of this kind of revolution is civil war, when the revolutionaries are (becoming) equal to the government in terms of social status and/or (military) power position. The Syrian revolution reached that stage in the launch phase. At a certain point unarmed protests decreased, while armed rebellion against the government increased. With cities conquered by the rebels and military operations initiated by the regime to take those cities back, there is no denial in the fact that Syria is encountering a civil war.

The fact that the Syrian revolutionary process is part of the larger revolutionary wave known as the Arab Spring does not automatically imply that it should also be considered a "revolution from the side". As the description on page 9 makes clear such a revolution is only the case when the process of revolution is deliberately transferred from one country to the other. During the Arab Spring this was not the case. Ideas, slogans and methods have spread throughout the region, but this happened because people in various countries throughout the MENA-region took over what they saw happening around them. As ideas spread and people saw that their own possibilities were larger than they originally imagined, the concatenation of revolutions in the MENA-region took place.

The core of each revolution is a radically different view on the future of society between the people and the government. This comes forward in slightly different words in every book, paper and report regarding the subject. There are always reasons why the people and the regime come to have such divergent visions. As explained in the theoretical framework all revolutions are caused by a causal structure, a web of underlying causes. This chapter will be an attempt to unravel the particular causal web that holds Syria in its centre. In order to do so, some theoretical views on the revolutionary process will pass by one more time and the empirical findings from the last chapter are then connected to the theories. As announced earlier the focus in this chapter will lay on the geographical factors that could be held responsible for the outbreak of a revolutionary process in Syria. As this is the pre-concluding chapter we strive for a clear structure and in that way pave the road for the final concluding chapter. To do so, the theories will be combined with the "trinity" of geographical factors (and the external factors mentioned in the theoretical framework under "Geography and revolutions") that influences this "triangle of causes".

As we have seen roughly the same cluster of factors can be held responsible for the unfolding of each revolutionary process. Of course the direct stimuli are dependent on the context and "attention should be paid to the particular socio-historical and cultural context" (Krejci, 1994, p.17) when looking at an individual uprising against the government. However, these contextual influences do not mean that the various revolutions throughout history originate out of a wide variety of causes. When we look at theories about the subject and reviews of insurrections in history roughly the same pattern manifests itself every time. Therefore, it should not really strike us as a surprise that this pattern is also visible in the case of the Syrian revolutionary process. In the next paragraph the pattern will be shown using the course of events in Syria as described in the second chapter and the theoretical views discussed in the theoretical framework.

3.2. Relative deprivation and social mobility

The revolutionary process started with a slogan written on a wall in graffiti. This one sentence embodied the essence of a revolution in general and of what was going to be one of the most brutal revolutionary processes in modern history: "the people want the regime to fall". The direct reason for this public written attack on the Syrian government is easy imaginable. The Syrian people had a plan for the future of Syria and they knew that that vision was impossible to realize as long as the Assad regime was in place. There was a discrepancy between the will of the regime and the will of the people. The large amount of distrust in the regime has been caused by the hollowing out of the Ba'ath party during the past decades. Although it once started as a revolutionary socialist and anti-imperial people's party, it turned into an authoritarian led repressing regime under Hafiz al-Assad and remained so under the rule of his son Bashar. The Ba'athism of the past fifty years caused the daily life in Syria to be suffering from corruption and cronyism. Important societal positions were impossible to reach through the normal route. Only family members, friends and acquaintances of the Assad were able to obtain high positions in business, politics or the military (Davidson, 2012).

The people of Syria lacked the possibility of social mobility. They were stuck in their situation without reasonable expectations of improvement. Without expectations of a better future a society wide feeling of hopelessness arose. The experience of a hopeless vision on the future evolved over time into the feeling that something *had* to change. In the end people are forced to undertake extreme measures, to stand up against the government, when they find themselves in a hopeless situation (Pareto, 1965 in Krejci, 1994).

However, the situation in Syria did not drastically change in 2011 compared to earlier years. Corruption has been widespread in the system for many years and mass uprisings against the regime have not taken place earlier, so hopelessness alone did not cause a revolution. There was more to it. An important factor that possibly explains the quite sudden rise of revolutionary feelings lies not in Syria, it originated elsewhere. Many countries in the MENA-region experienced corrupt governments, weak economies and little possibility for vertical social mobility, but that changed in 2010. The people of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and other states in the region successfully expelled the authoritarian regimes that had ruled the countries for many years, in some cases even decades. The people of Syria felt what could be described as relative deprivation. Their own situation did not worsen, but the situation of other people improved significantly. As the situations in various neighbouring states of Syria got better and the circumstances in Syria stayed the same, the people were relatively worse off. The Syrian people knew that their situation might be hopeless while living under the rule of Assad, but saw that change was possible if they only followed the way that was presented by the people of other states. We see that the pre-revolutionary society in Syria found itself in a somewhat similar situation as earlier described on page 11: "... people in different classes have the same rights and possibilities as they have always had, [but] the improvement of their prosperity causes them to want more. Such feelings can turn into feelings of injustice and lay the foundation for a revolution." However, in the Syrian case it was not the own improved prosperity that resulted in relative deprivation, it was the improved prosperity of the people of neighbouring countries that eventually resulted in feelings of injustice.

3.3.   Culture

A factor that most likely has contributed to the spreading of revolutionary feelings throughout the region is the shared culture. As the Arab Spring unfolded in a region where the dominant religion is Islam and the community that populates the MENA-region has a sense of shared history and experiences, it seems logical to consider those aspects as possible explanations for the revolutionary wave (Gelvin, 2012). The most striking of these are the common opposition to American activities in the region and the widespread support for the Palestinian cause. This feeling of unity might have played a role in the concatenation of revolutionary processes.

Also the violent history of the region could have played a role. As inhabitants of many countries in the region were accustomed to oppression and violence, it might have been a smaller step for them to take the streets themselves.

Both these factors could explain the high level of *esprit decorps*, a high moral, which the protesters had and is still shown by the outgunned forces of the FSA and other armed rebels who do not give up the fight. The high moral was an absolute necessity to turn the uprisings into revolutions. If the people had been more resilient to take up arms against the regime, the revolutionary process would have been aborted early on in the launch phase. The will of people to take the streets and to oppose the police and the army unarmed is what turned the Egyptian revolution for example into a success (purely looking at the revolutionary process). Also in Syria the mass protests did not fade out after the government had already proven that they were willing to use deadly force in order to call the revolutionary process to a halt while it found itself still in an early stage.

3.4. Demographical, Economic and Urban aspects

As discussed in the previous chapter Syria encountered a huge growth in the urban population during the last decades. The Arab region has always dealt with high fertility rates. Back in 1975 the previous leader of Syria, Hafez al-Assad was under the assumption that "high population growth rate and internal migration" were responsible for stimulating "proper socio-economic improvements" (Al-Tamimi & Svadkovsky, 2012, p. 1). These fertility rates seem to have been decreasing over the last years, but the earlier high natural population growth has resulted in an "all time high in the numbers of children and young people in the Arab region" (Mirkin, 2013, p. 13). Although the fertility of women in the child bearing age in Syria has decreased, the large size of this group will probably continue the large growth of the Syrian population for many years to come (Al-Tamimi & Svadkovsky, 2012). A large part of the total population in Syria was under the age of 25. An overall young population implies automatically that a large proportion of the population finds itself in the working class. When this goes hand in hand with a large supply of jobs it can cause economic growth, which has been the case in various Asian countries (Mirkin, 2013). However, if a country houses many jobseekers and there is too few paid labour to provide them all with a job it has several negative consequences. In Syria it forced many youngsters from rural areas to go search for a better life in the city. The demographical factor fertility combined with the lack of jobs caused by the poor Syrian economy induced a huge growth of the urban population in the last decades. That process eventually led to the insuperable clash between the people and the regime.

Syria evolved from a rural society wherein the city had a smaller role as the centre of decision-making, towards a society more based on cities. In line with Lefebvres' theory a next step in the process of turning into an urban society would be for the regime to improve the facilities and institutions and orient itself towards the social needs of the people. Cities like Damascus and Aleppo should in time become centres of urban life wherein the citizens could live satisfactory lives and develop themselves. To achieve that, the State should have focussed the urban planning in a way that stimulated people to make use of their right to the city, "to work, to training and education, to health, housing, leisure, to life" (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 179). In a Lefebvrian urban society the social needs of the people are to the utmost supported by both

the economical and the political sphere. Contrary to Lefebvres utopian ideas, the Syrian government, as discussed in the previous paragraph, did not seem to lay its focus on the qualitative improvement of its society. As a result the urban Syrian no longer saw their cities offer them prospects of improving their livelihoods or modern ways of life. Cities were developed during the past years. They had to because of the constant influx from rural regions and the natural growth of their populations. This development was however purely quantitative as the government only focused on more housing, by whipping up new quarters at the edges of the cities, and the improvement of infrastructure when necessary. Solely quantitative growth of a society is not enough to bring it to a higher level and in Syria the quantitative growth proved to be of an insufficient level to even hold society at the same level. In the Arab Human Development Report it is stated that there are a number of challenges for the governments in the MENA-region. Every single one of these challenges can be explained by the process of an evolution into urban society that takes too long. The evolutionary phase wherein Syria was situated was stretched out to far, it was thwart by the government. Mirkin (2013) names unemployment, underemployment and problems in job creation. In the same paragraph he states that "low labour participation, partial empowerment of women, environmental degradation, food and water shortages, rapid urbanization and the insufficient provision of housing, education and medical care" are complementary problems. The regime is culpable for a great deal of these problems. Some problems may not directly be the governments fault, but in those cases the regime is at least unable or unwilling to solve them.

Important causes for these problems can be found in the badly functioning Syrian economy. The urban situation is directly connected to the Syrian demography and the economic situation, as shown earlier a number of times. In this paragraph the economic factors will be laid out.

Two things that have always formed the foundation of the Syrian economy collapsed in the years prior to 2011. Those are the production of oil and the agricultural sector. There has been a decline in the national oil production since 2005. Oil production counted for more than 50% of the government income in 2005 and decreased to 35% in 2010 (Global Edge, 2012).

In the years prior to 2011 severe droughts badly damaged the agricultural sector. The production of wheat and barley significantly declined which, had its effects on both the income from export and the supply to the Syrian people. The decrease of the overall economic situation affected the Syrian society as a whole. The government simply did not have the money to provide its people with basic products and services such as electricity, water and bread, which had always been heavily subsidized by the government. Especially a shortage of bread and the resulting exploding prices for the most important product for calorie intake in the MENA-region were an important factor that contributed to the discontent among the population (Sternberg, 2012). As the government proved to be unable to take care of a steady supply of the most basic products and even bread became hard to come by the unrest rose. Higher prices and shortages have been caused by climate factors that led to a decrease in wheat production in some of the largest wheat

producers worldwide in 2010. In Russia and Ukraine extreme heat had been the cause of reduced harvests and in Canada and Australia the wheat production was affected in a negative way because of heavy rainfall (Sternberg, 2012). As the global wheat production had been diminished with a high percentage, the prices automatically increased. Also Syria was affected by raised wheat prices worldwide, while its national production had also been significantly decreased because of periods of extreme drought and heat. The shortfall of wheat drove even more people to the cities, the rural-urban migration increased and the cities got even more crowded. This of course had a self-enforcing effect, because with a rising number of people in a city the demand for nourishment increases even more.

The overall situation for the people of Syria deteriorated. The situation had been far from optimal because of demographical factors, that caused a rush to the city. The cities themselves were not aimed at fulfilling the social needs of their populations. The urban areas which got more and more crowded with "climate refugees" (Al-Tamimi & Svadkovsky, 2012, p. 2) as the years went by became a hotbed for feelings that something had to change. These feelings and thoughts got even more widespread when also a basic human need, access to food, was getting harder to come by. The legitimacy of the Ba'athist government, which had ruled the country with an iron fist for decades, was questioned when it could not longer feed the Syrian population. The external, environmental factors that caused a food shortage were to a certain level coincidental but they functioned as a catalysator to bring the reformist feelings even closer to the boiling point.

The people were denied their right to the city. The Assad regime "blocked the road that led to an urban society". According to Lefebvre the phase of urban society is only feasible when the process towards it is supported by the State. In the case of Syria there was no governmental support whatsoever and that meant the people had only one option left to modify social life and come closer to the desired urban society: urban revolution, *révolution urbaine*

Because Lefebvre wrote his theories in the 1960's and -70's and saw the world through Marxist glasses the revolutionary class in his works consist of the working class, the proletariat. When we look at the case of the (*urbaine*) revolutionary process in Syria we see that the particular socio-historical and cultural context provides the revolution with a different revolutionary "class". As Jones (1981) observed in his review of the 1848 revolutions, the anger felt by the population found its way out through the younger people. In Syria large numbers of men and women in their twenties and thirties lived closely together in crowded cities. They formed the "revolutionary army" that eventually took matters into their own hands. During the initial phases of protest and still, during the street battles, a major part of the people finally used their right to the city and stood up against the regime. It were especially men and women under the age of thirty (Lavender, 2012). It was this group that began the revolutionary process; it was this group that had their reasons to do so. They wanted freedom and basic human rights. Syria encountered a high level of youth unemployment, as did de entire MENA region. It is the region with the highest youth unemployment

worldwide, peeking in 2012 when almost a third of the youth in Northern Africa and the Middle East found itself jobless. They found themselves "dispossessed of the city" (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 179) with no chances to make full use of the city to live an urban life. As the government was known for its widespread corruption it was just a small step for the youngest layer of the population to lay the blame with the Assad regime. The people of the MENA-region made a "*visible and audible aim to global just politics*" (Agathangelou & Soguk, 2011, p. 552). As mentioned above, when a group of adolescents expressed those feelings with a writing on a wall, that set off the revolutionary process in Syria.

The group of protesters initially consisted mostly young people, but during the early stages of the revolutionary process when unarmed mass protests still was the weapon of choice other parts of society quickly joined. Low- and middle income classes quickly joined the protests. Somewhat later doctors, lawyers, clerics and other community leaders joined too and took the lead (Lavender, 2012). This turned the revolution into a process with a wide societal support.

With this description of the class of revolutionaries the causes for the Syrian revolutionary process has come full circle, as shown in figure 5. Demographical aspects of the Syrian society were for a great amount responsible for the poor economical situation of the country. Because of that particular situation many people moved from the Syrian periphery to the centres, the cities. The populations of large cities such as Damascus and Aleppo strongly increased and it was this growth of the urban population that eventually caused a *révolution urbaine* in Syria. The revolution began with a striking revolutionary class. In contrary to the classic Lefebvrian vision it was not the working class that stood up against its government, it was the exact opposite. In the Syrian revolutionary process it was the growing majority of unemployed youngsters that took the lead in an uprising against a crusted regime,

Figure 5 – Causal loop of the onset of the Syrian revolutionary process

making it a revolution of the *non*-working class. That in itself is again a demographical factor, which causes the pattern of this particular revolution to come back where it started. Demography influenced economy. Economy influenced the cities. Finally the urban revolution caused by these centres of urban life originated from the huge amount of youngsters that populated them.

In the last paragraph the factors leading up to the revolution have been laid out and the geographical aspects that caused and preceded the revolution in Syria are now clear. However, the aim of this thesis is to find out to what extent the revolutionary process as a whole can be explained from a geographical point of view. Therefore the geographical aspects of the revolutionary process itself still need to be analyzed. An
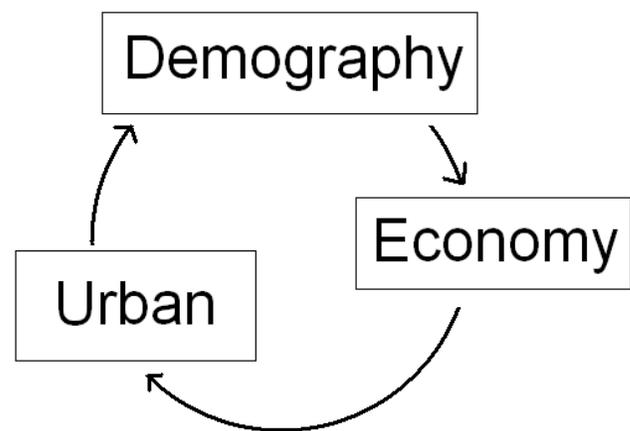
important element that can and must be linked to geography in order to fully understand it is the use of space, particularly the use of urban space, as a facilitating factor. The most prominent spatial aspects of the revolution were the use of the city as a space of mobilization and the use of the city as the playground of revolution. As these processes proved to be of great importance for the survival of the Syrian revolutionary process, they will be discussed in the following paragraph.

We learned that during the institutionalisation phase Local Coordination Committees were formed that "took responsibility for meeting, planning and organizing events on the ground within their own communities" (LCCSyria, n.d.). It were these organizations that popped up in the cities and small towns of Syria during the early days of the revolutionary process, that have played an important role in the launch of that process. By organizing events the LCC's made sure that the newborn revolution remained in progress. It is not coincidental that these committees came up in the Syrian cities. The potential of forming social movements had always been present in the cities in the MENA-region, although it had never played a role in social change (Castells, 1983 in Roy, 2013). The fact that the formation of social movements was put somewhat on the backburner in Syria is probably because of tight government control. As earlier mentioned on page 22 an organization such as the Damascus Declaration was also dealing with arrests and prosecution once the regime found out about its existence. However, in the wake of the Arab Spring and with the knowledge that a large part of society would back them, it seemed time for social movements to take their opportunity and make a change. LCC's mushroomed in various cities and towns throughout Syria and formed the organizational backbone of the early revolutionary process. The cities themselves formed the spaces of social mobilization as networks of friends, families and colleagues quickly set up the revolutionary committees. The cities infrastructure in this case did not consist of highways, pipes, wires, or cables, it formed "a platform providing for and reproducing life in the city" (Simone, 2004). The networks of people that formed the LCC's are a good example of what Simone (2004) calls *people as infrastructure*. With people as infrastructure Simone means the process of cooperation, capable of generating an unanimous front of people from a variety of various capacities and needs which attempts to derive maximal outcomes out of a minimal amount of options. The people behind the LCC's consisted for a large part of young people, but were quickly joined by people from the middle- and higher classes of society. With just the use of laptops and mobile phones the revolutionary committees organized protests of in some cases several hundreds of thousands of people, which surely is a maximal outcome from very limited means.

When a group of people claimed their right to the city, others followed quickly. The forming of the LCC's helped expanding Syrias' *révolution urbaine*. Once it became clear that relatively simple actions as mobilizing people through social media could have huge effects every town in Syria that joined the uprising against the regime got their own Local Coordination Committee. The people used their right to the city to use it as a space of mobilization and in that way give body to what were just thoughts and ideas about a different future. Those conceptions of what could and should happen to ensure a qualitative

growth in the personal lives of Syrias' population turned into a tangible revolutionary process once the city was used to do so.

During the Syrian revolutionary process the city as space was a crucial element for the process to survive and continue to exist. Cities throughout the whole country became "playgrounds of revolution". In the first months it were the city streets that were overflown with thousands of protesters openly questioning the legitimacy of the Assad regime. As the revolutionary process prolonged, the cities became the battlefields whereupon the Free Syrian Army waged war against the Syrian army.

During the first three months of the revolutionary process the protesting crowds remained relatively peaceful, although the government repressed the protests in increasingly violent manners. The people wanted change and claimed their right to the city by using that exact right to the city. The city was used as the stage of protests as people gathered in front of official buildings and other symbols of the regime the people wanted gone.

However, the city only became of essential for the revolutionaries once the non-violent protests made way for armed conflict between them and the government. Every time Assad noticed that his army's strategies were insufficient to end the revolutionary process, the level of violence used to quell the protests was increased. As will be shown in the next paragraph, security forces originally started with non-lethal riot control. After a short time they turned to lethal riot control, after which they turned to the besieging of entire cities and towns. When the rebels increased in numbers, battles were fought on the urban battlefields of Syria. At a certain point Assad apparently decided to commit "urbicide" as a weapon of last resort against the rebels. Entire city districts were shelled, which resulted in the complete destruction of neighbourhoods and the death of hundreds of people, both rebels and civilians.

Originally security forces (police and army) were deployed to control the mass protests in the city centers. To do this they used teargas, watercannons and dressed in riot gear. Later on this relatively harmless methods were replaced with more lethal ones, when it became clear that the protests would not be broken easily. Non-violent protests kept occurring over the whole country and beating down every individual protest proved fruitless for the government. People kept returning onto the streets, although the government at this point had already shown that they were willing to use deadly force against their own citizens. Again, the regime changed tactics and the new strategy used by the army was to besiege entire cities and towns, using tanks, large amounts of soldiers and cutting off phone-, water- and electricity facilities. Cities such as Dara'a, Homs and Hama were occupied by the Syrian army when the regime attempted to end the revolution once and for all. However, at this point the revolutionaries also began to resort to firearms. The armed revolutionaries were strongly outmanned and outgunned by the Syrian army, which is the reason they used guerilla tactics (Spyer, 2012). In the early days of what had become a civil war armed rebels mostly relied on roadside bombs or improvised explosive devices (IED's) and snipers capable of attacking the Syrian army unseen. As the conflict prolonged and the FSA was formed, their tactics

did not change much. Of course the scale of the attacks increased, because the FSA was capable of organizing larger assaults than the smaller local groups. However, most operations were still based on hit-and-run tactics, ambushes and other "classic insurgent tactics" (Enders & Landay, 2012). It was the city that provided the rebels with the possibilities to engage the Syrian army in that way. Relatively narrow streets provided excellent spots for ambushes and planting explosives and buildings functioned as hiding spots against helicopters and aircraft. Also the large (armored) vehicles used by the government were hindered in their movement by the urban environment and vulnerable to attack. The superiority of a more high-tech army strongly decreases in an urban environment (Graham, 2002). The FSA mainly uses guerilla- and hit-and-run tactics in their assaults on targets of the Syrian army (Brown Moses, 2013). They are forced to do so, because the advantages the army holds in both numbers and firepower would make classic warfare an unwise choice for the FSA. Engaging the Syrian army in "urban warfare" seemed like the smart thing to do for the rebels. The urban space that functions as the battlefield has given the rebel fighters the chance to prolong their military campaign. The fact that rebels used the city as the battlefield of their choice intrinsically challenged and diminished the power of the Syrian army (Graham, 2002). If the battles would have been fought in rural areas of Syria, the Syrian army would probably have prevailed because they would have had an enormous advantage in open terrain with their tanks, aircraft and helicopters.

The regime noticed that the rebels were harder to defeat than initially foreseen. For a last time the army used a different strategy. Neighbourhoods known for housing armed rebels were hit by artillery and rocket barrages. The use of these powerful weapons resulted in the complete destruction of buildings and infrastructure. The urban battlefield, that only worked against the governments army, was systematically destroyed. The Syrian regime committed urbicide in their own cities. The destruction of the hostile (for government forces) environment at the same time meant the creation of spaces that made Syrian soldiers less vulnerable to rebel attacks. Instead of giving space the chance to determine the war, the war was employed to determine the space (Salmon, 2002 in Graham, 2002).

Urban warfare continues in Syria, even at the moment of writing. The concrete battlefields of the cities provide the rebels with possibilities to attack and retreat quickly. The city as the "playground of revolution", as a facilitating space for urban warfare has proven to be a factor of significance for the prolongation of the revolutionary process. On the other contrary, the success that the urban environment meant for rebel forces resulted in the demolition of city centres, hostile spaces to the regime. In order to remove rebel forces from their playgrounds of revolution, the regime decided to commit urbicide.

As presented in this analysis geographical factors have played an important role in both the onset and the course of the Syrian revolutionary process in Syria. A short overview of the geography of the revolution will be given in the next chapter, accompanied by a critical evaluation of this thesis and some recommendations for potential future research.

Chapter Four - Conclusion

At long last we can come back to the central question that was the origin of this thesis:

To what extent can the revolutionary process in Syria be explained from a geographical perspective?

In order to formulate an answer to this central question the geography of the Syrian revolutionary process will once again and for the last time be presented. The results of the analysis will be presented in a clear and orderly manner. Firstly, the geographical factors that caused the revolution to unfold and the interconnectedness between them will be discussed. Secondly, an overview of the geography of the revolutionary process itself will be given. These brief descriptions of the outcomes of the analysis combined will form the answer to the question which formed the beginning of this thesis. As indicated in the introduction, one of the aims of this thesis was to find out if the processes that both caused the onset and the continuation of the revolutionary process in Syria also apply to other countries in the region. In other words, if the processes uncovered in this thesis could be used to explain the Arab Spring as a whole. Therefore that matter will be briefly discussed in this chapter.

Besides the formulation of an answer to the central question this concluding chapter will also contain a critical evaluation of this thesis and some recommendations for potential future research.

The cause of the Syrian revolutionary process lies in the interconnected spheres of demography, economy and urban life. The high fertility of Arab women has left the entire MENA-region stuck with a youth bulge of people between the ages of 15 and 24 (Mirkin, 2013, p. 7). There was not enough work to provide every job seeker with a job. This shortage was caused by an already poor economy that recently worsened because of the global economic crisis. The country simply had to deal with a surplus of young people looking for work. This resulted in high youth unemployment, which caused a wave of urbanisation as the jobless youngsters moved to the cities in the hope of a better future. The cities only grew in a quantitative way throughout the years, as the government did not invest in qualitative growth. The urban areas of Syria became overcrowded and there were to little facilities. The situation was worsened by increasing bread prices, as a result of a global wheat scarcity. People were denied their right to the city, the right to use the city as an instrument to live their life. The only way for the people of Syria to aquire this right was to alter social life, this could only be done by opposing the government. However, at this point the feelings of injustice had not yet grown large enough to make the people face their repressive government. That moment came when the people of other countries in the region opposed their regimes and claimed their freedom. The situation of those people increased as dictators were expelled. The people of Syria now felt relative deprivation, they were worse of than the people in neighbouring countries. At this point the causal structure that preceded the revolution came full circle. Demography influenced the economy and that combination led to urbanisation, which in the end caused the *révolution urbaine*. However, if it was not for the

initial revolutionaries to organize protests and openly claim their rights, the revolution would not have set off at that point. In the end it were the young revolutionaries, originating from the large youth bulge, that directly started the revolutionary process. In Syria the revolution against the regime began as a revolution of the *non*-working class. The causal loop thus again touched demography after it passed economy and the urban factor.

As a matter of fact more or less the same process did also take place in other MENA-countries that were affected by the Arab Spring. Practically the same could be said about the starting point of the Arab Spring, Tunisia, but also about Egypt, Libya and Yemen (Mirkin, 2013).

Not only the factors that caused the revolution have been to a large extent geographical, also the revolutionary process itself was characterized by geographical aspects. As the revolution in Syria could be characterized as an urban revolution, the cities have played an important role in the initial stages of the process. The city was used as a space of mobilization wherein Local Coordination Committees organized mass protests against the regime through an *infrastructure of people*. The city as mobilizing space has played a large role in the growth of the revolution.

The city also played an important role as the space wherein battles were fought during later phases of the revolutionary process, when the vertical revolution from below had already turned into a civil war. The urban infrastructure provided the rebels with opportunities to succesfully oppose a numerically and technologically superior opponent. The tactics used by rebel forces was finally countered by the Syrian army with the strategy of urbicide, the deliberate destruction of entire urban areas. By doing so the "playground of revolution" and the advantages it held for the rebels was deducted to ruins, which improved the chances of the Syrian army considerably

Geography has played an important role in the Syrian revolutionary process. As shown both the phases prior to the launch and the course of the actual revolution can be properly analyzed from a geographical point of view. Many of the factors that are part of the revolutionary process to some extent have a geographical character. Looking at the Syrian revolutionary process from a spatial point of view has proven to be both an interesting and useful way to explain it. The geographical aspects of revolution that came forward in this thesis are certainly generalizable to some extent for other revolutions, especially other revolutions that were part of the Arab Spring. As mentioned earlier every situation is however different and each individual case has to be placed in its own context. It would therefore be unfair to state that the causes of the Syrian revolutionary process are point for point applicable to all other cases in the Arab Spring. The fact remains that might be quite some overlap in the causal structures of the various revolutions that occurred recently in the MENA-region.

This research has been based on reports about events in Syria that the writers witnessed firsthand, or got directly from people who have witnessed it and sources that analyzed those firsthand stories. To ensure a

proper objective research multiple newspapers from various countries have been used. However, the biggest weakness of this research remains that it is completely based on what other people (journalists, researchers, revolutionaries, regime loyalists) wrote. It would considerably strengthen the claims made in this thesis if future research is actually held in Syria with a focus on field research.

Also for instance political factors, both national and international, have not been included in the analysis in this thesis, as one of the main goals was to look at the situation from a purely geographical point of view. It is absolutely recognized that other aspects outside the geographical sphere also played a role in the Syrian revolutionary process, but in order to hold a clear focus on the spatial side of the story some aspects have not been given as much regard as they might have deserved. This could also be taken into account for future research projects. It might be very interesting to find out exactly which influence different political, ethnical or religious factors had on the Syrian revolutionary process.

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